

## Using the Toulmin Model

Stephen Toulmin ( *The Uses of Argument*) provided a model of argument structure that gives us a tool for both evaluating and making arguments. The main parts of Toulmin's model are the **claim** (or conclusion), the **grounds** (also called the stated reason), and the **warrant** (also called the unstated assumption in the case of enthymemes). Let's examine a few arguments.

1. Initial argument: After-school sports programs are bad for teenagers because they take away study time.
  - a. Claim: After school sports programs are bad for teenagers
  - b. Stated reason: they take away study time
  - c. Unstated assumption: *[loss of study time is bad for teenagers]*
2. Initial argument: After school sports programs are good for teenagers because they teach responsibility, team work, and time management.
  - a. Claim:
  - b. Stated reason:
  - c. Unstated assumption:
3. Initial argument: Aquatic turtles make good pets for children because they are gentle.
  - a. Claim:
  - b. Stated reason:
  - c. Unstated assumption:
4. Initial argument Aquatic Turtle make bad pets because they can carry salmonella poisoning
  - a. Claim:
  - b. Stated reason:
  - c. Unstated assumption:
5. Initial argument: Sid is a bad team captain because he is too bossy
  - a. Claim:
  - b. Stated reason:
  - c. Unstated assumption:
6. Initial argument: Sid is a good team captain because he is decisive in moments of crisis.
  - a. Claim:
  - b. Stated reason:
  - c. Unstated assumption:
7. Initial argument: Cocaine and Heroin should not be legalized because legalization would greatly increase the number of drug addicts.
  - a. Claim:
  - b. Stated reason:
  - c. Unstated assumption:

8. Unstated assumption Initial argument: Cocaine and heroin should be legalized because legalization would eliminate the black market in drugs.
  - a. Claim:
  - b. Stated reason:
  - c. Unstated assumption:
9. Initial argument: Karate class is good for children because it promotes self confidence.
  - a. Claim:
  - b. Stated reason:
  - c. Unstated assumption:
10. Initial argument: Karate class is bad for children because it encourages violence.
  - a. Claim:
  - b. Stated reason:
  - c. Unstated assumption:
11. Initial argument: Welfare benefits for unwed mothers should be eliminated because elimination would greatly reduce the nation's illegitimacy rate.
  - a. Claim:
  - b. Stated reason:
  - c. Unstated assumption:
12. Initial argument: Welfare benefits for unwed mothers should be retained in order to prevent poverty and hunger
  - a. Claim:
  - b. Stated reason:
  - c. Unstated assumption:

You almost certainly discovered that when you examined some of the unstated assumptions (as well as some of the stated reasons) you found yourself in disagreement. (It would be hard not to, since many of the arguments are mutually exclusive). What you have discovered, of course, is that arguments need more than just claims, reasons, and warrants. Often both stated reasons and warrants need support or backing in the form of examples, statistics, witnesses, expert testimony—anything that might be called “non-rhetorical means of persuasion”. Such backing is generally called *evidence*. It is a good exercise to imagine someone challenging each reason and warrant with a question such as “Why do you think so?” or “How do you know that?” What kind of backing might be necessary to persuade a reader or listener to accept each of the stated reasons and unstated assumptions in the previous arguments. Imagine some kind of backing for stated reason and each unstated assumption.

It is sometimes possible for a reader or listener to accept both the stated reason and the underlying assumption yet still reject the conclusion. Consider the following argument:

We should legalize cocaine and heroin because taxes raised by the sale of these legalized drugs would provide needed revenue for many valuable government programs.

Fill in the argument structure:

- a. Claim: We should legalize cocaine and heroin
- b. Stated reason:
- c. Unstated assumption:

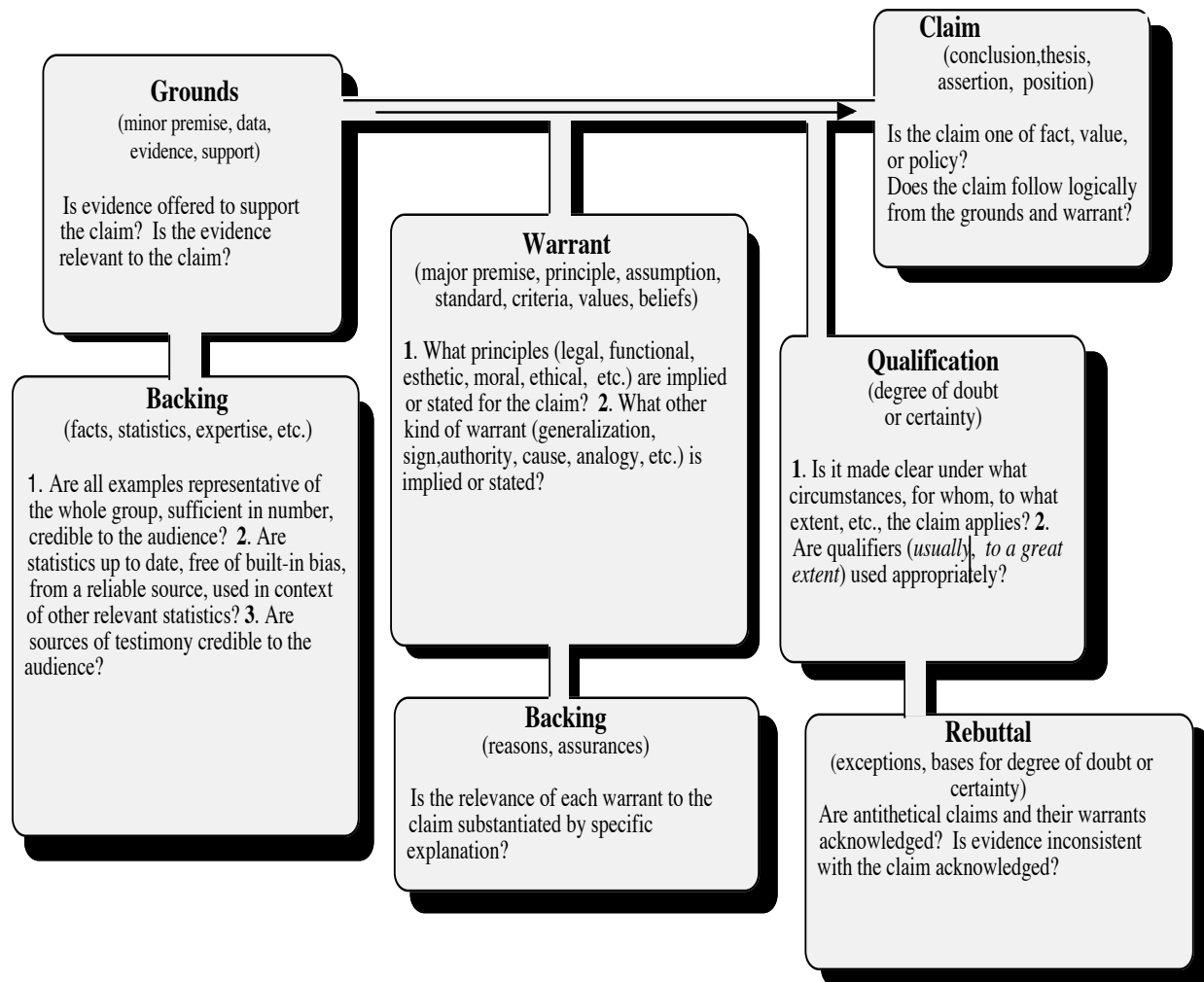
Now imagine an opponent saying, “Wait a minute. Won’t high taxes simply raise the price of the drugs and create a black market, with all the crime and violence involved in a black market?” The opponent agrees that money would be raised and that the money is needed, yet feels that other considerations may outweigh these factors. The opponent has provided a *condition of rebuttal* for the argument. Any exceptions to either the warrant (the unstated assumption) or the stated reason may potentially derail an argument. Thus a shrewd arguer will anticipate such objections and provide for them in advance by qualifying the claim:

We should *probably* legalize cocaine and heroin because taxes raised by the sale of these legalized drugs would provide *some* needed revenue for many valuable government programs, *as long as we don’t raise the taxes on such drugs to the level that they would encourage a black market.*

The words “probably” and “some” are *qualifiers*, and the words “as long as we don’t raise the taxes on such drugs to the level that they would encourage a black market” make up a *condition for rebuttal*.

At this point, we have the beginning of an argument. What is now needed is the actual evidence or backing for both the stated reason and the unstated warrant, along with some assurance that the conditions of rebuttal will not be reached—that is, assurance that the taxes will be low enough to make a black market impractical. Please note, however, that a full argument for the legalization of drugs will involve many more such stated reasons and underlying warrants, each with its own needs for backing and conditions of rebuttal.

Now go back to the first ten examples and imagine the full Toulmin structure. On the charts provided or on your own charts, fill in each of the statements and suggest both the kinds of backing needed and potential conditions of rebuttal. Then try to construct an arguable thesis statement for each.



One of Toulmin's samples:

